

AMD17-084 4/15/08

Bell, Leanne S (DOT)

From: Kevin Hood [kevinhood6@hotmail.com]
Date: Sunday, April 13, 2008 5:54 PM
To: DOT STIP
Cc: Palin, Sarah H (GOV)
Subject: Friends of Berners Bay comments to DOT re STIP Amendment 17
Attachments: 4.13.08_Friends_of_Berners_Bay_letter_to_DOT_re_STIP_Amendment17.doc

To the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities:

Please find Friends of Berners Bay's comments regarding Statewide Transportation Improvement Program Amendment 17 below and attached:

To the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities:

This letter provides the comments of Friends of Berners Bay for Amendment 17 of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

Friends of Berners Bay is a grassroots organization with fifty-five current members in Juneau. Many of our members are long-time residents; some were born here. All of us have a strong connection to Berners Bay. Friends of Berners Bay was established in the mid-1980s in response to the proposed Cowee-Davies Timber Sale that threatened the largest stand of old-growth forest accessible to Juneau residents by a short hike. Our group has remained active through the years, defending the natural integrity of treasured Berners Bay.

Friends of Berners Bay opposes any construction on the Juneau Access Road. Our reasons are as follows:

1. The Juneau Access Road should not be allowed to go forward until the full cost has been determined. The DOT has been unwilling or incapable of calculating the true cost of the Juneau Road – Ferry Project. It has a poor track record so far, estimating a pioneer dirt road around Berners Bay would cost \$30 million when the lowest bid came in at \$51.5 million. If the D.O.T. cannot properly account for a dirt road with no bridges, how can we believe their \$374 million price tag for the entire paved highway with numerous bridges, elevated structures, retaining walls, tunnels, other constructs – including a new ferry terminal, a new parking lot and new shuttle ferries? This project is of the scale of Boston's Big Dig, which was originally estimated at \$2.6 billion, but ended up costing in excess of \$15 billion. No one would allow a contractor to work on their home without a realistic cost estimate and Alaskan taxpayers expect the same. Friends of Berners Bay insists that the cost of the road be verified by an independent auditor prior to any construction.
2. The Juneau Access Road should not be allowed to go forward until full funding has been secured. The Alaska congressional delegation has made it clear that federal funding will be decreasing in the upcoming years. There is a real risk that the DOT will start the Road this summer and seriously impact Berners Bay. The incomplete road will serve no purpose until full project funding is secured since travelers in Lynn Canal will need to use the Auke Bay Terminal for many years, if not indefinitely should full project funding never be obtained. In other words, don't start what you cannot finish. That would be a lose-lose scenario for all.
3. Prior to any construction, there needs to be an analysis conducted by an independent auditor comparing the costs-benefits of the Juneau Access Road and the Alaska Marine Highway System. Again, DOT has been unwilling or incapable of making an apples-to-apples comparison. The Lynn Canal component of the AMHS has actually covered its operating and maintenance costs and returned a modest profit when it has been managed by people who are interested in seeing the AMHS succeed. No other highway in

Alaska returns money to Alaskans. Additionally, such a comparison must include the comprehensive costs of each system, including for the Juneau Access Road the costs of helicopters to clear avalanches, the costs of snow plows to cover 50 more miles of road and the insurance the state must carry to cover claims for accidents along this road.

4. Another reason Friends of Berners Bay opposes road construction is because we value the wild character of Berners Bay. Unroaded nature is integral to our quality of life and we treasure the prosperity it provides: habitat for game hunting and wildlife viewing; salmon spawning grounds that support commercial, sport and subsistence fishing; ecosystems that give us clean air, water and food for gathering; scenery which attracts tourists who support our businesses; serene places where we get away from it all; waters and mountains that allow us to challenge ourselves; wild places where we bond with family and friends on camping, boating, flying, kayaking, skiing and cabin trips. For us Alaska is the last place to embrace the wilderness experience that defined the rugged, independent and reliable American character. For Friends of Berners Bay and the many other residents who cherish these unique Alaskan wilderness values, paving a highway around Berners Bay and beyond does not represent progress. It represents destruction.

Anywhere else on Earth, Berners Bay would be recognized as a national treasure. The severe wall of Lion's Head dominates the north, a sharp ridgeline closes in the east and the turbulent Chilkat Mountains tear up the western horizon. The waters erupt every spring in a food-web-wide celebration of hooligan, herring, gulls, eagles, seals, sea lions and humpback whales. Native Alaskan ancestral burial grounds lie in the forest. Moose hunters explore the Antler and Lace Rivers. The bay offers excellent fishing opportunities, including a steelhead run closeto Juneau. Kayakers and boaters camp out in secluded coves.

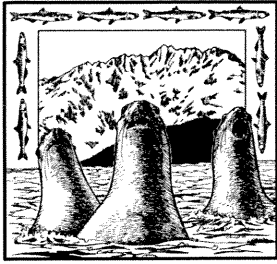
My hope is that the DOT will take these comments to heart and take steps to regain its credibility and professionalism. We need a DOT that recognizes the value of unroaded places such as Berners Bay in order to preserve the Alaskan way of life.

Sincerely,

Kevin Hood
Friends of Berners Bay Representative
PO Box 32202
Juneau, AK 99803-2202

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Berners Bay Alaska



Keep it WILD
Friends of Berners Bay

FRIENDS OF BERNERS BAY

PO Box 32202
Juneau, AK 99803-2202
April 13, 2008

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